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ATLANTA MODEL, A PROGRAM FOR IMPROVING BASIC SKILLS.

ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS, GA., COMMUN. SKILLS LABS.

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A PROGRAM TO OVERCOME RACIAL AND SOCIAL DIFFERENCES IN SPEECH PATTERNS, READING ABILITY, AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR IS DESCRIBED IN THIS REPORT. COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS LABORATORIES HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED IN NINE HIGH SCHOOLS, INCLUDING SEVERAL INTEGRATED SCHOOLS. LISTENING, SPEAKING, READING, AND WRITING ACTIVITIES ARE FEATURED. INSERVICE TEACHER TRAINING HAS BEEN DESIGNED FOR THE LABORATORY TEACHERS, REGULAR FACULTY MEMBERS, AND NEW STAFF TEACHERS IN THE NINE HIGH SCHOOLS. RACIALLY INTEGRATED TEAMS OF THESE STAFF TEACHERS VISIT OTHER ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS, INCLUDING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, TO TEACH 1- TO 5-DAY ENRICHMENT UNITS. THE REGULAR CLASSROOM TEACHERS IN THESE SCHOOLS ARE THUS RELEASED FOR INSERVICE TRAINING. AT 3-WEEK SUMMER WORKSHOPS TEACHERS ARE INTRODUCED TO NEW TECHNIQUES OF READING INSTRUCTION, ORAL PATTERN PRACTICE DRILLS, AND COMPOSITION INSTRUCTION. (DK)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Atlanta Public Schools

"The American public school is a curious hybrid: It is managed by a school board drawn largely from upper class circles; it is taught by teachers who come largely from middle-class backgrounds; and it is attended mainly by children from working-class homes. These three groups do not speak the same language." This observation, made by Watson Goodwin in his foreword to Reissman's The Culturally Deprived Child, has been true for many years within the education system of Atlanta and many other cities of America.

Desegregation of Atlanta's schools has increased the difficulties of communication and the differences in levels of achievement within an individual school. In turn, student difficulties present teaching problems. A confrontation of both kinds of problems--those of students and of teachers--may mean a more rewarding approach to learning and instruction in the Atlanta Public Schools.

Many learning problems do not find their origins in race or in I.Q. Rather they are the result of cultural and social differences. Consequently a means of communication which is of immense importance to the student may be completely unknown or disdained by the unrealistic teacher. Recognition of such facts as these has led to a close look at how Atlanta can begin to change its attitudes, its techniques, and its instructional program to meet the challenge of changing needs. This recognition has led, as well, to the realization that differences of speech patterns, reading ability, and social behavior must become less distinctive if human relations in the school and in the community are to improve.

The activities reported here have been directed toward lessening the differences and increasing the understandings in nine high schools in disadvantaged areas of the city. They have been directed toward giving every child a reason to like himself. They have been directed toward establishing a common "language." And they have been directed toward the retraining of large numbers of Atlanta's regular faculties in more productive methods of teaching the culturally different student.

LABORATORY ACTIVITY

Four Communication Skills Laboratories were established in four integrated high schools in Atlanta in September, 1965. Five additional labs began operation in five other high schools in disadvantaged areas in September, 1966. These nine labs are operating to improve interpersonal relations among students by raising the achievement level of both white and Negro students who are two or three grade levels below the "average" student in the communication skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Ideally, students in the labs were selected from rising eighth graders by special testing techniques aimed at identifying those students who are deficient in language skills but possess sufficient ability and stability to achieve up to or beyond grade level. Various measures were utilized: Metropolitan Reading Test (timed and reinforced), Gray Oral Reading Test, Dolch, various individual tests, and the student's cumulative test record. Because of scheduling difficulties and overcrowded conditions, some students were intially selected solely on their elementary school folders.

Four classes daily are scheduled for the lab in each school. Each class is composed of from twenty to twenty-five students under the direction of two teachers. The teachers operate in a team situation. Each child has his own individual schedule for a week, either on a bulletin board or in his folder. This schedule indicates which group he joins at the first of the period for each different day of the week, and what changes he makes to various groups within each period on particular days. These schedules are meticulously made out and changed, according to a student's needs and his progress in various areas of work. Time which the teachers do not spend with the students is spent in in-service training, in the preparation of materials and the grading of student work.

Methods of instruction in the nine labs are necessarily varied to suit the needs unique to the school situation. For clarity, methods are generalized here, within the four basic areas of communication skills

a. Listening

Students in these labs must learn to follow oral directions, to formulate visual images from oral stimuli, to accurately discriminate sounds and usage (differentiating standard and nonstandard English as well as the proper time to use each), and to build listening skills for understanding and enjoying oral communication. Students listen to taped or recorded stories and anecdotes at listening stations or to oral presentations by the teacher. As a follow-up, the students must discuss the material, answer questions, or relate the communication to each other through accurate retelling, which requires accurate listening. Again, students might discriminate between two stimuli: for example, Dizzy Dean and David Brinkley. Further, pattern practice (aural-oral methods), reading, and composition activities might stem from a listening session.

b. Speaking

On the basis of the conclusions of such scholars as Raven McDavid, William Stewart, and others, that a new dialect can best be taught by foreign language audio-lingual techniques, repetition drills and pattern practice drills are used to teach new habits of speech. As in the teaching of a modern foreign language, at least two general areas of learning are involved: the correct reproduction of sounds, with the involvement of stress, pitch, and juncture; and the automatization of grammatical structures.

The students in the labs, therefore, through repetition drills and a variety of substitution and mutation drills, are learning the reproduction of sounds in the standard English speech of their geographical region. They are establishing habits of new structural patterns, and are gaining competence in standard usage. A conscious effort is made by the lab teachers to make as much as possible of this learning fun for the children. For example, prior to the drill on the use of do, does, don't and doesn't, the students repeat the absurd little rhyme,

Jane, Jane gives me a pain;
She doesn't seem to have a brain.

The drill itself becomes fun, since it uses the material in the rhyme: "Does John give you a pain? Yes, he does. Do we give you a pain? Yes, you do."

Choral readings, short poems and plays, socio-drama, and mock job interviews and telephone conversations are also used. Individual practice is given through use of tape recorder and Language Master stations. Incidentally, lessons involving the prized "machinery" are usually self-motivating. In addition, movement from station to station several times during the period allows the restless eighth grader sufficient physical activity, thus increasing his attention span and his learning.

c. Reading

Basic reading skills are emphasized in the labs. Students are guided toward strengthening word attack skills, increasing comprehension, developing vocabularies, expanding visual perception, and increasing reading rate. Small libraries of high interest, low vocabulary selections are located in each lab as well as "reading corners." Periodic trips to the school library are also made.

Varying methods are used in teaching reading skills to severely handicapped readers. Some labs have primarily used a phonics approach along with developing a basic sight vocabulary. Several labs have concentrated on a programmed approach which uses a sound-symbol relationship and carefully controls vocabulary by presenting pattern words. Some experimentation has been done with linguistic, language experience, and individualized methods. Instruction is given on several levels in small groups and individually.

As in the other areas of communication our teachers endeavor to make the reading instruction interesting and, when possible, fun. Flash cards and games, both commercial and "homemade," are utilized, as are books appropriate to each student's reading needs. Flannel boards, oral drills, context clues and proper dictionary use--as well as individualized Language Master work are used for vocabulary drill. Students are given practice in finding the main idea, identifying sequence, understanding details, finding specific or implied meanings, and drawing conclusions.

Although forced reading rate is not emphasized, increased visual perception is developed in each individual. The student is paced

by tachistoscopic devices. Numbers, words, or geometric forms at various shutter speeds force the student to focus and perceive quickly. The Craig Reader, the Controlled Reader, and the S.R.A. Reading Accelerator aid in building reading rate relative to reading purposes, and in preventing regressions. The inventory of such mechanical aids varies from lab to lab.

d. Writing

Efforts in teaching composition are being expanded. Extreme controls are necessary for simple expository writing, and experiments are underway to identify successful techniques in this area. Creative writing has proved rewarding. Various methods of motivating verbal and written creativity have been used with various results. Sometimes the result is considerable student insight. "Red is the color of the devil's shoe,/And Red is the color of melted barbed wire." At other times students find their emotions and ideas virtually impossible to express in words. Free and unselfconscious response to color, art, music, photographs, or class discussion is not the rule; it is, however, possible.

Handwriting practice, using the overhead projector for demonstration, is proving beneficial. Handwriting to music has proved to be a most successful way of improving handwriting. Mechanics such as spelling and "grammar"--taught inductively in aural-oral drill--are taught at every level of ability.

Teachers consciously and conscientiously praise daily work. Student work is sequenced for success experiences and graded relative to the student's ability. Conferences are held with parents, counselors, and the individual students. In addition, work is planned to focus on emotional and personal problems similar to the student's own. Group cooperation and understanding is the norm.

IN-SERVICE TRAINING IN THE COMMUNICATION SKILLS LABORATORIES PROGRAM

In-service training in the Communication Skills Laboratories program in Atlanta is conducted in three areas: the continuous training

of lab teachers, the initial and continuing training of staff teachers, and the training or "re-education" of regular faculty members in the high schools in which labs are operating. It is in the implementation of the third area that we believe most other school systems are interested. It seems necessary, however, that an explanation of the first two areas be presented, in order to make the total program understood, and to make the program for regular classroom teachers fit into the picture with good sense.

Lab teachers who have taught in the CSL program for a year have had a rather comprehensive experience. They have learned more by doing, by the knowledge that they were free to be as innovative as they chose to be, than they could have learned in "courses." They were conscious, throughout this program, that they were responsible for testing the efficacy of their own techniques, their own innovations. For the most part, they have done this, and have discarded or modified practices, and enlarged others, according to the success of each practice. Although we knew that these experiences were valuable learning experiences, we also realized that help in teaching practices advocated in the labs was necessary. Consequently lab teachers came to the Instructional Services Center three times a week, from 1:30 until 3:30 in the afternoon, during the first semester of last year for instruction and the sharing of ideas. During the second semester, this was reduced to once a week, as the teachers picked up additional teaching loads of problem learners within their own schools.

Beginning with the fall of 1966, five new labs were in operation. These were staffed by last year's staff teachers and by five teachers who were participants in a three-week summer workshop in Language Laboratories, conducted as a five hour graduate course at Emory University. Of the eighteen lab teachers, thirteen are white and five are Negro. In one all-Negro school, there is a team of one white teacher and one Negro teacher. It is proving to be an excellent situation.

In-service training of lab teachers for this school year presented problems. Eight teachers had had a year's experience; four

had had a year's experience as release teachers and six had had only three weeks of very concentrated instruction, but no lab experience. A system has been worked out in which experienced lab teachers are working in small groups with new lab teachers, for the exchange of knowledge, instruction, techniques, and ideas. It is proving to be profitable to both groups. The experienced lab teachers are finding it necessary to organize, clarify, and explain to others their own goals, methods and techniques. The new lab teachers are receiving the most valuable kind of learning from teachers who have tried out methods, and can explain their purpose, their use, the pitfalls, the rewards.

Some experiences are new to all lab teachers, such as demonstrations of new book series, equipment and materials. All lab teachers participate in these experiences. The general atmosphere of sharing knowledge and know-how is constantly evident in this group.

Staff teachers in the CSL program serve an unusual purpose. They are prepared to go into any school in the Atlanta School System, elementary or high school, in any subject matter area, and teach an enrichment unit of from one to five or more days' duration, to release regular classroom teachers to come in during school time for in-service training. These young people are interviewed and selected, not just for their intellectual promise but for their enthusiasm for working with disadvantaged children, their imagination in instructional procedures, their ability to adapt to any and all types of school situations, and their willingness to take acceptance or rejection by faculties, with equal grace. This team of staff teachers is composed of both white and Negro teachers. They release in schools with integrated faculties, in those with all Negro faculties and in those with all white faculties. Since we make no distinction in their assignments, and since it is obvious that they make no distinctions among themselves, their presence is making a great impact in those schools whose faculties are not yet integrated. It is a means of pointing out very graphically the ease with which the two groups have become one. We do not have to talk about integrated groups of teachers; this is such a group--not only successful together, but extremely happy.

These staff teachers go through a three-week orientation period with other staff teachers in the Atlanta system the first three weeks of school, during which they learn things about the city, its cultural and educational advantages, what the school system is like, the fringe benefits involved, the salaries, absentee practices, and the like. They are indoctrinated into the problems of the disadvantaged child--his home and neighrborhood situation, his language habits, his probable intelligence which is not adequately tested by group intelligence tests.

Three weeks of concentrated training in CSL problems and methods follow this general training. Instruction is given in the teaching of listening, the teaching of reading, the use of oral drills, the teaching of composition. Time is allowed for the construction of units for teaching, both in and out of their subject fields. In-service education of these staff teachers continues throughout the year in the same areas as those in which lab teachers receive instruction. It cannot be conducted on a regular basis each week, however, because of their schedules for releasing teachers during the normal teaching day.

The in-service training of the regular classroom teachers varies in the amount of time and the kind of instruction. Released from their classrooms by staff teachers, they spend the entire school day at the Instructional Services Center under the supervision of the Coordinator of In-Service Training for CSL, for as many days as have been decided upon in advance. Initially, the regular classroom teachers are confronted with the statistical facts concerning Atlanta's urban school population, the fact that this population is over fifty per cent deprived. These teachers, although they know they are dealing with children who are retarded in their school achievement, have very little conception of some of the basic reasons for this retardation. They know little of the poverty and lack of attention that result in a bottle of "pop" for breakfast, no insistence on cleanliness, no place or proper light for homework. They are not really aware of the poverty of sustained conversation in these homes, nor of the fact that these children hear, for the most part, monosyllabic utterances, and many of these four letter words. These teacher's don't actually realize that there are no books nor magazines in the homes

of these children, and that they have had no experience in seeing people read for pleasure. Nor do these teachers know that many of the children they are teaching have seldom if ever been out of their own neighborhoods.

This whole early process--learning something about the typical slum home, and discovering actual home conditions of some of their students--is a traumatic experience for some of these young, new teachers. This fact makes the necessity for discovering some of these realities all the more urgent.

Although the time spent with the regular classroom teachers is shorter than we would like, as much specific training as possible is included in these few days. These teachers are given ample time to observe in one or more labs in order to be a part of a classroom totally different from the traditional one. They are allowed time to question the lab teachers or the instructors who accompany them as to the rationale back of a particular method or device, the ways of going about a particular practice,and the results of a particular technique.

When they return to the Center, there is an opportunity for further discussion and questioning with regard to the labs. If English teachers are in for training, they are then presented with as much instruction in the actual teaching of reading as time will permit, and are given leads to further instructional materials in this area. They are urged to take a new look at the importance of teaching the listening skills, and are given many suggestions as to the ways of teaching these skills. They are instructed in the rationale back of the oral drills for teaching the structure of standard English and its pronunciation. They receive instructions in the construction and use of the drills, and are also given an opportunity to play the roles of students in going through several of the drills. They are urged to make themselves at least familiar with the implications for the classroom of structural linguistics and transformational grammar. They receive instruction and suggestions in the teaching of basic composition.

The Coordinator of In-Service Training for CSL, who has a wide knowledge of the problems involved and the methods used in the labs, supervises the entire program for the regular classroom teachers.

She permits some time in their schedule to share ideas and practices which are already successful for them and to construct materials which they can take back to class for immediate use. These activities are as profitable as any of their general instruction, and encourage these teachers to continue their own innovative ideas and plans.

Groups of teachers from disciplines other than English are given the same opportunity for visiting the labs and becoming familiar with general teaching practices with regard to the disadvantaged child. The coordinators of the various subject matter areas then become deeply involved in this in-service education. They assume the responsibility for teaching new techniques in their disciplines, methods of presenting their subject matter to disadvantaged children, and new philosophies and attitudes peculiar to their subjects. The CSL Reading Specialist works with these teachers in the problems of the teaching of reading in the subject matter areas.

Comments from some of these classroom teachers who have been through the in-service program are interesting. One of them was, "I felt just as you said we would feel, that no one could teach my classes as well as I could. I resented coming in. And now I can tell you that no three-day period in my preparation or my experience has been more valuable than these three days of training."

A three week concentrated workshop is conducted in August, in connection with Emory University. This workshop allows five hours' graduate credit, and, to teachers in the Atlanta system, a stipend of $75.00 a week, tuition and fees free. The workshop is conducted to introduce, as rapidly as possible, methods in the teaching of the four communications skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing to disadvantaged students. Its sessions include the teaching of reading, the construction and use of oral pattern practice drills, and the teaching of composition. Material is disseminated and discussion is included on the subjects of linguistic terminology and the linguistic approach to the teaching of grammar, the history of linguistic science, and the history of the English language. Resources for the teaching of spelling and handwriting are included.

The purpose of the workshop is to give brief but essential training to teachers who are going into new lab situations, to teachers who are to teach the ninth grade students who had been in the eighth grade labs, and to teachers of regular English classes who recognize their own need for new approaches. The response to a request for applications to the workshop was overwhelming, and many able and interested teachers had to be turned down.

The Communication Skills Laboratories program will hopefully be expanded. Dr. John W. Letson, Superintendent of the Atlanta Public Schools, feels that the basic ideas of the program are sufficiently sound to be incorporated into the regular school program. Up to this point the project has been funded by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Obviously a school system must look at projects of this kind, assess their value, and make the crucial decision as to whether to abandon them, when Federal support no longer exists, or to incorporate them into the general program.

The decision to incorporate the basic philosophies and techniques of CSL into the regular program of the Atlanta Public Schools has been made. Gradually more school personnel will come to realize that no child's dialect or environment is "wrong." Gradually more will realize the unique nature of each individual student, and teach to that point, instructing the student on the level where he is rather than where he "should" be. Such individualized instruction is, itself, a communication skill.